

Basic Bible Doctrine

Lesson 9: Ecclesiology (The Church)

I. Introduction:

If you ask most people, “What’s a church?” they will point to a beautiful building made of brick or stone with a distinctive steeple. Yet, a biblical understanding of the church will reveal that it is much more than that. In this study, we will examine the biblical instruction about the church in order that we might conform to God’s standards for our local body.

A. How do many modern Christians esteem the church?

B. What is the danger of undervaluing the church?

II. Origin:

Before we arrive at the proper definition of the church, it will be helpful to discern its origin.

A. Some people will contend that the church began in the Old Testament. In their minds, the church and Israel represent the same thing – the people of God. How does the following passage grate against that notion?

Matthew 16:18 “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

B. According to ***1 Corinthians 12:13*** what must take place for someone to become a part of the body of Christ?

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

C. When did this baptism take place?

Acts 1:5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

Acts 2:1-4 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

From the previous line of thought we can conclude that the church began at Pentecost. It was anticipated by Jesus and His disciples, but did not come to fruition until the disciples and the other followers of Christ were baptized in the Holy Spirit. Once this occurred, Jews and Gentiles became the body of Christ.

We should note that throughout the New Testament, the authors never confuse the church with Israel. They are two separate entities with a distinct purpose and a place in God's plan. In the words of Paul:

Romans 11:11-15 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.¹² Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!¹³ But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry,¹⁴ if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them.¹⁵ For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

III. The Definition of the Church:

- A. **Definition:** The church is the community of all true believers from the day of Pentecost forward.
- B. **Local:** The most common use of the word *church* in the New Testament is to designate a group of believers that is identified as a local assembly or congregation. Thus there was a church in Jerusalem (*Acts 8:1; 11:22*), in Asia Minor (*Acts 16:5*), in Rome (*Rom. 16:5*), in Corinth (*1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1*), in Galatia (*Gal. 1:2*), in Thessalonica (*1 Thess. 1:1*), and in the home of Philemon (*Philem. 2*).

These early believers did not have special buildings in which to meet; instead, they met in homes (*Rom. 16:5; Philem. 2*). We know from the Scriptures that these Christians came together for worship (*1 Cor. 11:18*), fellowship (*Acts 2:45–46; 4:31*), instruction (*Acts 2:42; 11:26; 1 Cor. 4:17*), and for ministry such as sending out missionaries (*Acts 13:2; 15:3*). The result was that people were continually being saved (*Acts 2:47*).²

- C. **Universal:** While the local church views the church as a group of believers gathered together in a particular locality, the universal church views “all those who, in this age, have been born of the Spirit of God and have by that same Spirit been baptized into the Body of Christ (*1 Cor. 12:13; 1 Pet. 1:3, 22–25*).”² It was this corporate group of believers that Christ promised to build (*Matt. 16:18*); it was this Body for whom Christ died (*Eph. 5:25*), and He is the head over it, giving it direction (*Eph. 1:22–23; Col. 1:18*). In *Ephesians 1:23* the church is referred to as “His body.” This cannot refer to a local assembly but must depict instead the universal body of believers (cf. *Col. 1:18*). A

²Enns, Paul P.: *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago, Ill. : Moody Press, 1997, c1989, S. 348

² Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, revised by Vernon D. Doerksen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 307.

particular emphasis of the universal church is its unity: whether Jews or Gentiles, all of us together compose one body, in a unity produced by the Holy Spirit (*Gal. 3:28; Eph. 4:4*).

- How much overlap is there between the local church and universal church? Why is it important to keep this in mind?

IV. The Purpose of the Church:

The purpose of the church can be broken down into three broadly inclusive categories.

- A. **Exaltation:** As with all things in the Christian life, the church has been formed to exalt God.

Ephesians 1:12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

1 Peter 4:11 Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

- Why must exalting God be the primary purpose of the church?

- B. **Edification:** The local church has a spiritual obligation to nurture and build up the faith of Christians who attend.

Colossians 1:28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

Ephesians 4:12-13 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

- How do the members of the church edify each other?

- C. **Evangelism:** The purpose of nurturing and edifying the believers is so that they can fulfill the following commands:

Matthew 28:19-20 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Acts 1:8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

1 Peter 2:9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’s OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

1. How can Evangelism and Edification get out of balance in the church?
2. What can we do in order to make sure that we have a healthy mixture of both?

V. The Government of the Church:

A. Elders:

In the New Testament there are two terms which identify an elder. The first term is *presbuteros* where we get the term Presbyterian. Literally meaning an older man (*1 Tim. 5:1*), it is used in a figurative sense for leaders. The term “elder” stresses the dignity and the maturity of this lofty office. It is these elders that have the authority to distribute money (*Acts 11:30*), make decisions regarding what constitutes orthodox doctrine (*Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22; 16:2*), are to be respected (*1 Tim. 5:17*), and visit the sick (*James 5:14*).

The other term used is “overseer” or *episkopos* from which we get the term Episcopal. This term means to watch over and stresses the function and the duty of an elder. They are to nurture and protect the flock of God entrusted to their care (*Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:7*). A comparison of *Acts 20:17, 28* and *Titus 1:5, 7* reveals that these two terms were used interchangeably.

The qualifications of elders are set forth in *1 Timothy 3:1–7* and *Titus 1:5–9*. Elders are to be typified by the following fifteen characteristics. As we review these characteristics think through why each is essential for spiritual leadership.

1. **Above reproach:** he is one who “can’t be censured”; there is nothing in his life for which to accuse him.
2. **Husband of one wife:** it does not mean “one at a time” (polygamy was unknown among Greeks and Romans); he has not been divorced and remarried³.
3. **Temperate:** he is sober in judgment.
4. **Prudent:** he is discreet, sound-minded.
5. **Respectable:** he is well balanced, not abrasive.
6. **Hospitable:** he loves and hosts strangers.
7. **Able to teach:** he discerns and communicates sound doctrine.
8. **Not addicted to wine:** he does not linger at the table drinking wine.
9. **Not pugnacious:** he is not a fighter.

³ In my view there is a possible allowance for a pre-salvation divorce.

10. **Gentle**: he is reasonable.
11. **Uncontentious**: he avoids fighting.
12. **No lover of money**: he is not greedy or irresponsible concerning money.
13. **Managing his own household**: he attends to his own family so that they are faithful and are orderly.
14. **Not a new convert**: he is not a neophyte.
15. **Good reputation with unbelievers**: he is respected in the community at large.⁴

- Why does God have such high standards for elders?

B. Deacons:

The word *deacon* (Gk. *diakonos*) is the common word that means “minister” or “servant” and is used many times in the New Testament in a nontechnical sense (*Matt. 20:26; Mark 9:35*).

Whereas it is not clearly stated, it appears that the origin of the office began in *Acts 6:1–6* where seven men were selected to care for the material needs of widows in the congregation. That allowed the apostles to devote their time to prayer and ministry of the Word. This indicates the function of deacons is to be subordinate and auxiliary to the elders; while the elders teach the congregation, the deacons care for the material needs of the congregation.

The qualifications of deacons are given in *1 Timothy 3:8–13*. Deacons are to be typified by the following eight characteristics:

1. **Men of dignity**: they are serious, worthy of the respect of others.
2. **Not double tongued**: they do not spread conflicting stories in the congregation.
3. **Not addicted to much wine**: they show moderation in the use of food and drink.
4. **Not fond of sordid (or dishonest) gain**: they are not greedy for money and do not use their position for financial gain.
5. **Holding to the mystery of the faith**: they practice what they proclaim.
6. **Tested**: they have been observed and found to be approved.
7. **One wife**: they have not been divorced and remarried.
8. **Good managers of their households**: they are qualified to manage church affairs because they can manage their own home affairs.⁵

- What is the key difference between deacons and elders?

C. Theories of government:

⁴Enns, Paul P.: *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago, Ill. : Moody Press, 1997, c1989, S. 355

⁵Enns, Paul P.: *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago, Ill. : Moody Press, 1997, c1989, S. 356

1. **Episcopal:** Derived from the Greek word for overseer (translated bishop in the KJV). These bishops oversee a group of churches and have been imbued with the power to ordain ministers or priests. Examples of this kind of government include the Methodists, Episcopalian, and Roman Catholic Church. Though this is not taught in the Scripture, adherents point to position of James at the counsel of Jerusalem, and Paul’s commission to Titus and Timothy to appoint elders.
 - What are the pros and cons of this approach?

2. **Presbyterianism:** Found mainly within the Presbyterian and Reformed churches, this model designates that the church is run by qualified, godly, and mature leadership. The members of the congregation appear to have had a voice in who governs. They chose the seven deacons in *Acts 6:1-6* and set aside Barnabas and Paul for missionary work (*Acts 12:1-3*). Though the congregation took part, the unity of the church was maintained by a carefully devised system of graded church courts. In the Presbyterian church for instance, the elders elected by the congregation form a session which governs the local church. Above the session is a presbytery comprised by all ordained ministers and one ruling elder from each district. And above the presbytery is the synod, and above the synod is the general assembly – the highest court. In this form of government there is usually a distinction between the teaching and ruling elders. The teaching elder is the primary minister ordained by the other elders. He is in church for the instruction of the flock. The ruling elder may not preach, baptize, or administer communion, but they oversee church discipline and various financial responsibilities.
 - What are the pros and cons of this approach?

3. **Congregationalism:** Emphasizing the autonomy of the local church as well as democracy followers of this polity hold that no one man or group of men should exercise authority over Christ’s church. Rather, decisions are subjected to a congregational vote. This is particularly argued from the stand point of the priesthood of believers, and some of the examples of the congregation putting forward leaders in *Acts (6:3-5; Acts 14:23)*. This is the predominant form of government in the Evangelical Free, Congregational, and Baptist traditions.
 - What are the pros and cons of this approach?

The Following Chart summarizes the positions:

FORMS OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT			
Form	Adherents	Authority	Basis
Episcopal	Roman Catholic Orthodox Episcopal	Bishops	<i>Acts 6:6; 14:23</i> <i>Galatians 1:19; 2:9</i>

	Lutheran Methodist		
Presbyterian	Presbyterian Reformed	Elders	<i>Acts 20:17</i> <i>1 Tim. 5:17</i> <i>Titus 1:5</i>
Congregational	Congregational Baptist Mennonite Evangelical Free	Congregational	<i>Acts 15:12, 22–25</i> <i>Colossians 1:18</i> <i>1 Peter 2:9</i>

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In the final analysis, the evidence of the Episcopal form of government is minimal. The biblical teaching of the function of elders grants the Presbyterian form of government strong support. It should also be noted that throughout Acts the congregation did indeed have a voice, and that the churches were relatively autonomous – unhindered by the sophisticated bureaucracy of modern day Presbyterianism. Thus, the proper form of church government is more than likely a combination of the Presbyterian and Congregational model.

VI. The Ordinances of the Church:

At the heart of the church’s faith are the rites of the Lord’s Supper and Baptism. These are usually called sacraments or ordinances. Sacraments comes from the Latin word *sacramentum*, which applies to anything sacred or consecrated. In the Roman Catholic tradition, the term suggests a magical power associated with both baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Thus, Protestants prefer to use the term ordinance which means “an order.” These are rites which were ordered or ordained by the Lord.

A. Baptism:

1. The Command:

The example of Jesus (*Mat. 3:13*), numerous passages from *Acts* (*2:38, 41; 8:12, 36-38, 9:18; 10:47; 16:14-15, 33; 18:8; 19:5*), and the reinforcement of this practice in the epistles (*1 Cor. 1:14-17*; possibly *Rom. 6:1-4; Col. 2:12*) make it clear that God expects all Christians to be Baptized.

2. The Meaning:

- a. *Identification with Christ:* The phrase “*in the name of Jesus Christ*” (*Acts 2:38*) at that time was a technical term signifying ownership.⁷ In addition, *Romans 6:4* equates baptism with Christ’s saving work.

⁶Enns, Paul P.: *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago, Ill. : Moody Press, 1997, c1989, S. 359

⁷ Robert L. Saucy, *The Church in God’s Program* (Chicago, Moody: 1972) pp. 193-4.

Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

- b. *Identification with the Church:* One is not united to the head without at the same time being united to the Body:

1 Corinthians 12:12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.

Thus, baptism was an initiatory rite into the local church which closely follows salvation:

Acts 16:33 And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household.

- c. *Symbolic of Spirit Baptism into Christ:*

Galatians 3:27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Colossians 2:12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

3. The Efficacy:

- a. Baptism is often spoken as being closely related to salvation. But this does not mean that it is instrumental in salvation.

Acts 2:38 Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”⁸

Acts 22:16 ‘Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.’

⁸ Grammatically, this passage does not support the notion that one must be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Repent is a plural command which matches the plural clause “for the forgiveness of your sins.” “Be baptized” is a singular clause setting it off from the rest of this sentence.

It should be noted that in each of the above passages faith is explicitly mentioned along with Baptism. In addition there are many occasions in the New Testament where salvation is mentioned without reference to baptism (*Acts 15:9; Eph. 3:17; Gal. 2:20; 3:2, 14*). Even the Apostle Peter who issued the difficult statement in *Acts 2:38* clarifies his understanding on the efficacy of baptism with *1 Peter 3:21: Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,*

In the words of one theologian:

*Christian baptism is conversion baptism. It formed in the New Testament the final act of repentance-belief-baptism response to the proclamation of the gospel. Thus, although salvation is through faith, baptism as the expression of this faith was often joined to the reality . . . The relation between baptism and faith must never be construed, however, so as to make the rite **the faith** which brings salvation. Rather, in every biblical example, the inward, saving faith precedes baptism, and in some instances at least, it is clearly manifest that the gifts of salvation are bestowed as the fruit of that faith prior to baptism.”⁹*

4. The Subjects:

- a. Baptism was a rite given to the faithful after they believed. The consistent New Testament pattern of hearing, believing, and being baptized testifies to this.

Acts 2:41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.

- b. In light of this, does the bible allow for the Baptism of infants?

Note: There is no explicit mention of infant baptism in the New Testament. At best pedo-baptists can point to three instances of household baptism (*Acts 10:44¹⁰; 16:14-15¹¹; 16:31-34¹²*). In each of these cases, it is highly speculative that children were included.

⁹ Saucy pp. 197-8.

¹⁰ In this passage the participants also received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues which would preclude infants.

¹¹ The way Lydia is introduced would suggest that she is a widow. There was no mention of a husband, she was an independent business woman, and her request to host Paul and Silas would seem presumptuous if a husband was in the picture.

- If someone were to baptize an infant, what would that indicate about the composition of the local church?

- Let’s say that someone was baptized when they were twelve years old and made a profession of faith during summer camp. After this time, they lived a life of total immorality and unbelief, but came “back to faith” in college. With much teaching and soul searching they conclude that they were not saved at twelve. What should they do?

- How would you counsel someone who has made a profession but does not want to be baptized?

B. The Lord’s Supper:

1. The Institution of the Lord’s Supper:

Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper on the eve of His crucifixion, commanding that His followers continue to observe it until His return (*Matt. 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–23*). This was a new covenant or testament in contrast with the old Mosaic covenant. To enact the covenant, death was necessary because death provided forgiveness of sins. Paul also rehearsed this ordinance for the Corinthian church (*1 Cor. 11:23–32*). Traditionally there have been four distinct views in Christendom concerning its meaning.¹³

2. Views on the Lord’s Supper:

VIEWS ON THE LORD’S SUPPER		
View	Christ and the Elements	Significance
Transubstantiation (Roman Catholic)	Bread and wine literally change to body and blood of Christ	Recipient partakes of Christ, who is being sacrificed in the Mass to atone for sins.
Consubstantiation (Lutheran)	Bread and wine contain the body and blood of Christ but do not literally change. Christ is actually	Recipient receives forgiveness of sins and confirmation of one’s faith through partaking of the elements, but they must be received through faith.

¹² In the case of the Philippian Jailer, Acts 16:34 states “having believed in God with all of His household.” This suggests that no one was baptized without first believing.

¹³Enns, Paul P.: *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago, Ill. : Moody Press, 1997, c1989, S. 360

	present “in, with, and under” the elements.	
Reformed (Presbyterian, Reformed)	Christ is not literally present in the elements but there is a spiritual presence of Christ.	Recipient receives grace through partaking of the elements.
Memorial (Baptist, Mennonite)	Christ is not present physically or spiritually	Recipient commemorates the death of Christ.

¹⁴

- Which is the preferred view?

The memorial view has much to commend it in the Scriptures. An examination of the passages reveal that the Lord’s supper is a memorial to His death (*1 Cor. 11:24, 25*): the recurring statement, “in remembrance of Me,” makes this clear, the bread symbolizing His perfect body offered in sin-bearing sacrifice (*1 Pet. 2:24*) and the wine His blood shed for forgiveness of sins (*Eph. 1:7*). It is a proclamation of the death of Christ while waiting for His coming (*1 Cor. 11:26*): it involves a looking back to the historical event of the cross and an anticipating of His return in the future (*Matt. 26:29*). It is a communion of believers with each other (*1 Cor. 10:17*): they eat and drink the same symbolic elements, focusing on their common faith in Christ. ¹⁵

3. The Participants of the Lord’s Supper:

The most instructive passage regarding who participates in the Lord’s supper is:

1 Corinthians 11:27-32 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. ²⁸ But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. ³⁰ For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.

- i. How can one eat the bread and drink the cup in an unworthy manner (cf. *1 Cor. 11:19*)?

¹⁴Enns, Paul P.: *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago, Ill. : Moody Press, 1997, c1989, S. 362

¹⁵Enns, Paul P.: *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago, Ill. : Moody Press, 1997, c1989, S. 362

- ii. Before one participates in the Lord's Supper what must they do (v. 28)?
- iii. What are the consequences of not taking the Lord's Supper in the right manner?
- iv. Does this passage allow for non-Christians to take communion? Why or why not?

C. Church Discipline:

Though this is not an "ordinance" per se, Jesus clearly commands that a local church engages in this practice in His first command to the Church.

Matthew 18:15-18 "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. ¹⁷ "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ "Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

1. Why are many local congregations reluctant to practice this?
2. How does this practice help to build the church?

VII. Conclusion:

As we have discussed, the church is not a building. On one level it represents all those who have been genuinely saved, redeemed, and baptized into the body of Christ. On another level, it represents a congregation of baptized believers who seek to fulfill the great commission. A biblical church is one which includes:

1. A Mission to Glorify God
2. The Proclamation of and the Belief in the Biblical the Gospel.
3. The Teaching of the Scriptures.
4. Saved/Baptized Membership.
5. Biblically Qualified Leadership.
6. The Administration of the Lord's Supper and Baptism.
7. Church Discipline (See ***Matthew 18***)

If any of these are missing, than the organization does not fall into the category of a Biblical local church. In a day an age where para-church ministries dominate the religious

landscape, we should always remember that the Lord prizes, cherishes, and promises to build His church.